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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the method adopted in a short course to improve group interaction in the foreign language classroom by giving students the opportunity to engage in group interaction and in this way sensitizing them to group dynamics. It provides the outline and rationale of the course, a detailed description of one unit, and evaluation comments. Each unit, lasting about two hours, has the following components: (1) problem-solving activity; (2) feedback on group interaction provided by an observer; (3) a language input session intended to remedy some of the communication problems; and (4) a section called "mass production" in which students put to use what they discussed in the feedback. Interactional analysis, teacher observation, and a discussion of the course by students were used to evaluate the course. (AMH)

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SENSITISING THE LEARNER TO GROUP WORK

A Method

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the method adopted in a short course designed to improve group interaction in the Foreign Language classroom, which was piloted in April, 1978 with students of the Institute for English Language Education, University of Lancaster.

PART I: OUTLINE OF THE COURSE

Groupwork in the Foreign Language (FL) classroom is often not as successful as it might be, because the participants are not aware of the difficulties groups can create. We have therefore designed a course to help students and teachers to overcome some of these difficulties.

I.1. The Course

The course consists of six units and lasts approximately 12 hours; in each unit, students experience group interaction, focus their attention on particular aspects of this interaction, and then discuss how to improve on their performance.

I.2. A Unit of the Course

Each unit begins with a 15-minute problem-solving activity designed for four students; this, therefore, is where they experience group interaction. The problem is always non-technical, is not tied to any specific linguistic level, and requires the students to communicate with each other to reach the solution. This solution must be agreed on by all the members of the group.

A fifth member sits outside the group and acts as an observer - he does not participate in the task. He is briefed beforehand by the teacher and given an observer sheet, which directs him to record specific features of the group interaction - which are the focus of the unit.

After the problem has been solved, the observer joins the group and tells them what he has been observing, presents his findings and initiates a discussion based on these findings and on further questions found on the observer sheet. This activity is called the feedback and it gives the students opportunity to discuss ways of improving their performance in the future.

The problem-solving task and feedback are the Core Components of the unit. There are also two optional components. (If only the Core Components were used, the course would last six hours approximately.)

Since the course is for F.L. learners, a language input session is included. During the task and the feedback the teacher has been noting any problems the students have in communicating and these will form the basis of this session.

The final activity, Mass Production, is a practice session, where the students put into use what they discussed in the feedback; this activity takes place with groups of five, which are different from the groupings in the problem-solving task, and there is no observer. Mass Production is divided into six parts, one to be done in each unit, and lasts throughout the course. The students have to produce a simple end product, but first have to organise their production and estimate the quantity they will be able to produce in a given time.

The breakdown of one unit is presented diagrammatically below.

Figure 1.

Activity	Approximate Time Allowed
Problem-Solving Task (Monitored by Observer)	20 minutes
Feedback on Interaction (Initiated by Observer)	20 minutes
(Break)	(15 minutes)
Language Input	50 minutes
Practice: 'Mass Production'	15 minutes
	Total: 2 hours

If the timetable does not allow a two-hour lesson, then the first two components can be completed in one lesson, as it is essential that the feedback follows the problem-solving task without delay. The other two components can take place at another time. The length of the language input can also be adjusted.

PART II: RATIONALE FOR THE COURSE

This part considers the need for sensitising individuals to group interaction, followed by the reasons for designing the course in the way we have.

II.1. Groupwork and Sensitisation

Groupwork in the classroom is often not very productive because teachers may not be well acquainted with organising students into groups, and secondly, groupwork may come as a novel experience to the students. Even in the cases where teachers and students are familiar with groupwork, this will not guarantee efficiency.

One of the most effective ways of giving those involved in the learning process an opportunity to take part in efficient group interaction is by sensitising them to the processes of group behaviour. This view is shared by Schein (1965) who states

> "one major determinant of group effectiveness is the sensitivity of group members and formal leaders to the kinds of problems groups generate."

In the language classroom, the teacher who decides to use groups faces three basic problems. First, the students are predetermined, so he must take measures to ensure that they form a cohesive group. Second, he must try to direct the groups toward working productively in the completion of the tasks. Third, since the students are learning a language, they must all be given ample opportunity to express themselves in the target language (TL). It is in order to overcome these problems that there is a definite need to sensitise the students to them.

II.2. The Factors for Sensitisation

When isolating the processes to which the students would be sensitised we decided it would be more instructive to concentrate on the sociological (rather than the psychological) aspects of group behaviour, as we do not want to change individuals' personalities but rather to create an environment where the group makes the most of the human resources it has at its disposal, and where all the members are positively involved. To clarify the distinction between the psychological

and sociological factors, we quote from Newcombe et al., (1952) on leadership:

> "Leadership is best understood as a role relationship in which one or more members are recognised as special facilitators toward group goals."

The leader role, therefore, is seen as one of many roles filled by members of the group, each of which may be significant. It was these roles that we concentrated on, rather than the characteristics of the individuals in the group.

In Part III we describe the second unit of our course, the focus of attention being communication networks and role relationships. The theoretical basis of this was the work done by Leavitt (1951), Bales (1950) and Lewin et al. (1939). The aim is to make the students conscious of the tendency for some individuals to dominate groups and also of the fact that individuals tend to communicate more with some members than others. Since the processes to be focussed on form the basis of the observer sheets, we did not wish to make the observers' task too technical and complicated, but rather to offer them a starting point for further discussion from their experiences both inside the classroom and outside it.

II.3. The Observer and the Feedback

The placing of a member of a group in the role of observer will contribute to that individual's understanding of group processes:

> "There is some evidence that individuals who observe groups learn more about group dynamics than those who participate..."
>
> (McLeish, Matheson, and Park, 1973)

This is, in part, due to the fact that the observer, by not being directly involved in the interaction, is free to devote his time to gaining an overall picture of the group at work.

Furthermore, the observer provides a certain objectivity to the discussion which takes place in the feedback session, first because he does not take part in the activity and is, therefore, not personally involved as to how well the group functioned, and second because he has collected verifiable evidence on the group work. This is significant not only because it provides a factual basis for discussion, but also because the presentation of this information comes to the group members from one of their peers and not the teacher. Hence, the evaluation of

the individuals' roles in the group emanates from the group itself.

For each group activity, a different member of the group performs the role of observer. The fact that he does not participate in a particular activity highlights his particular role in the group, by changing patterns of participation, leadership and so on.

The feedback session require each participant to take on a completely new role in the group: the role of chairman, which will give him a personal responsibility for ensuring that the discussion is constructive and directed toward the focus of the session. This position is a demanding one and it is interesting to see how the students cope with it.

We believe that since the students will learn about group dynamics largely by discussion among themselves, they will feel a greater responsibility for making use of it. They are therefore more likely to adapt their behaviour in the group accordingly. This is in contrast to the situation where knowledge is thrust on them by someone in a position of authority, and they are often not able or motivated to assimilate or use it.

The observer should direct the discussion towards the focus, but at the same time allow the members to arrive at their own conclusions. All the members will have something to contribute to this discussion and furthermore it will be meaningful, because it has evolved from a real experience, which was common to all of them.

Lastly, the feedback offers the group an opportunity for tension release, where an individual who is dissatisfied with his own or someone else's contribution can voice his opinions. From this group members can decide on ways of combating dysfunctional processes, and reinforcing the positive forms of behaviour, for implementation in further tasks.

II.4. Group Work and Problem-Solving

It might not seem very logical or relevant to be employing problem-solving tasks in a F.L. setting but, in fact, we believe this approach can be usefully practised in the language classroom.

Firstly problem-solving tasks create a real need for the students to communicate in the TL and, if they are well chosen, will interest

and motivate the students to put their active knowledge of the language into spontaneous use. The types of task we have employed have the added advantages that they are short, they are easy to administer, and can be employed at various levels. They require little previous factual knowledge on the part of the students, and the outcomes are easily evaluated. Furthermore the students need to use not only their linguistic abilities, but also their cognitive abilities in solving the problems.

More specifically to the course we produced, they offer a valid means of assessing students' abilities in coping with group interaction and thereby give the teacher and students concrete instances of areas in the process to which the students need sensitising.

II.5. The Teacher's Role

The desirability of pupil-centred learning and the necessity for a non-intrusive teacher role if significant learning is to take place has been extensively discussed. Carl Rogers, for instance, argues that the teacher should become a "facilitator of learning", a flexible resource-centre to be utilised by the group, who "endeavours to recognise and accept his limitations" as a member of that group (Rogers, 1969). The teacher's role, then, is to "emancipate students from dependence on him (and other authorities) as the source of knowledge and competence and to encourage their own motivation" (Abercrombie, 1970).

Although this approach has been implemented for some years in many primary and secondary schools in Britain, it has not permeated very far in direct relation to ELT materials published in the U.K.; something about its basic nature seems to "set foreign language teaching somewhat apart from other disciplines" (Moskowitz, 1970). However, we believe that this non-dominant role requires careful interpretation if it is not to be associated with teacher passivity or lack of commitment. The language teacher, above all, is faced with the paradox noted by Barnes (1976) wherein he finds his responsibility divided between the need to encourage active formulation of learning on the one hand and the need to control pupils' learning on the other.

Because we feel that the teacher has a responsibility to ensure both of these factors in the classroom, we would argue that he must be seen to be involved without being obtrusive. This, we believe,

can be achieved by carefully and sensitively observing the learners in action in groups and pinpointing the relevant problems for later feedback sessions.

If the teacher wishes to offer any language input during the course, it should be on the basis of difficulties noted while monitoring the problem-solving tasks and the feedback. The input, then, will be as a result of a real need created by the students themselves while interacting with each other. Furthermore this input should not be limited to purely structural items, since these alone are not, of course, everything a student requires to communicate effectively in the TL.

PART III: BREAKDOWN OF A UNIT

In order to give a clear picture of what is actually entailed in using this course, we have selected one specific unit to discuss in detail and examine in relation to the classroom procedures and decisions the teacher is likely to be involved in at every stage from start to finish.

Figure 2 below gives a complete breakdown of Unit 2; each component of this breakdown will then be considered in some detail.

Figure 2: Breakdown of Unit 2

Activity	Unit 2	Approximate Time Allowed
Problem-Solving Task	Spot the Difference	20 minutes
Feedback	Focus: Communication Networks; Role Functions and Leadership.	20 minutes
(Break)	-	(15 minutes)
Language Input	-	50 minutes
Practice: Mass Production	Role Allocation	15 minutes

III.1. Spot the Difference

For this task, each person is given a picture, depicting the same scene, but each one differs from the others in two small details, thus making a total of eight differences in all. To solve the problem, as the title implies, the group has to identify these differences without looking at any other picture, apart from the one distributed to each individual at the beginning. The instructions are given in written form on a separate sheet of paper, distributed with the pictures, face-down, at the beginning of the task; there is only one set of instructions per group. As each difference is found and agreed on, the relevant feature is marked on each picture with an 'X'. There is a 15-minute time limit. (See pp. 10-12).

Therefore, in order to find the solution, the group has to decide both on how this can be done (i.e., by asking questions about the pictures or describing them) and also on an efficient method of

exchanging and recording information as a group.

III.2. The Observer and the Observer Sheet

While the problem is being solved, the observer is noting the patterns of communication within the group, by recording the amount and the direction of communication between individuals during the task (i.e., who talks to whom and how often). He does this by charting the information on his observer sheet, which is designed to make this as straightforward and clear as possible. On the sheet, each participant is represented by a circle (see p. 13), with arrows marking the direction of the addressees. An arrow pointing away from the rest of the group indicates remarks made to the group as a whole, rather than to specific individuals. Every time someone speaks, the observer makes a mark along the arrow in the appropriate direction; he also begins counting to five and if the same person is still communicating in the same direction when five is reached, then he marks the same arrow again. The final result is a record of the communication networks within the group.

(Note: We could not claim that this record is exact, but would emphasise that it is the overall patterns which are of importance here. In our experience, we have, in fact, found that with an observer using this format, these patterns emerge fairly distinctly at the end of the task and do reflect the nature of the communication in the group. Furthermore, we have also found that this format is easy to use and follow, even when the observer's linguistic ability is limited.)

III.3. The Feedback

The focus of this feedback in the sensitisation process emphasises the importance of each individual and the role he plays within the group. The information recorded on the observer sheet therefore highlights both the amount spoken by each individual and the patterns of communication within the group as a whole. The emergence of a dominant leader, for instance, will be shown if a predominance of the remarks made by one person are addressed to the group as a whole and if a predominance of the remarks made by the rest of the group are, in turn, addressed to him.

This focus also reinforces the focus of the previous unit (leadership roles), thus creating a cyclic effect, so that the group builds on what has already been discussed and, hopefully, assimilated.

The observer will have a few minutes between the completion of the task and the beginning of the feedback session, which gives him time to assemble his information and to organise his thoughts. The observer has total responsibility for the feedback; firstly he is required to give information drawn directly from the communication networks on the observer sheet and then to develop a discussion which considers the broader implications of these networks. The emphasis of the feedback, therefore, moves from objective observations to the more subjective, taking into account the participants' feelings during the task and suggestions for improvements to the group's performance. The questions on which this is based, and which give shape to the feedback, are given on the observer sheet.

MATERIALS FOR UNIT 2

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

DO NOT SHOW YOUR PICTURES TO EACH OTHER!

You each have a picture. However, every picture differs from the others in two ways. For example, picture (1) has two things which are different from the other pictures, and so on. Therefore, there are 8 differences in all.

Your job, as a group, is to discover these differences. You can find out these differences by asking each other about your pictures, but you must NOT show your pictures to each other.

When you discover a difference, you should all mark the point with an "X". When you have 8 differences, you have solved the problem. Check your answers with your teacher.

(YOU HAVE 15 MINUTES)

(1)

(2)

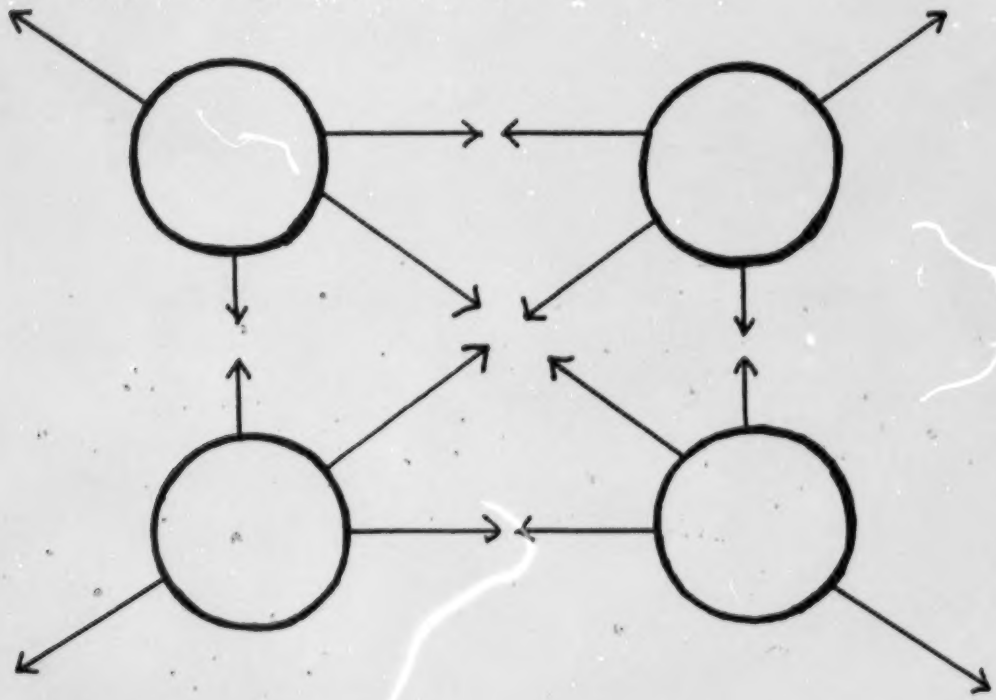
(Picture adapted from an illustration in Contact English,
Granger, C., and Hicks, T.
Heinemann Educational Books Limited, 1977)

(3)

(4)

OBSERVER SHEET

1. Write the name of one of the group in each circle given below.
2. Each time somebody speaks, mark the arrow pointing in the direction of the person he's speaking to.
3. If he's speaking to the group in general, mark the arrow pointing away from the group.
4. As soon as somebody starts speaking, begin counting to 5. If he's still speaking when you get to 5, mark his arrow (in the correct direction) and begin counting again.



The Feedback

1. Using your information

a) list in order who spoke the most down to who spoke the least.
b) list who spoke the most to whom down to who spoke the least to whom. This should include speaking to the group as a whole.

Then tell the group this information.

2. On the basis of this, you should lead a group discussion of the following points:

a) Why were the lines of communication like they were?
b) Were the lines of communication effective for completing the task, and if not why not?
c) Was everyone happy with the way they participated?
d) What things do you think the group should pay attention to in the future?

III.4. The Teacher's Role

During the unit, the teacher has to perform a number of different functions. These functions are outlined below and certain points are then discussed further, in the light of observations made when using the course ourselves.

III.4. (i) Setting up the problem-solving task

1. The teacher asks the students to organise themselves into their groups and re-arrange the classroom as necessary. He calls the observers to one side.
2. The teacher briefs the observers and gives them some indication of the nature of the problem so that they will be able to follow the drift of the group's discussion. He checks that they understand the format of the observer sheet.
3. The teacher asks the observers to write the name of each participant in the relevant circle on the sheet before they join the group. The briefing normally takes 3-5 minutes.
4. The teacher distributes the instructions and the pictures, face down, to each group. He emphasises that the students should only communicate in English and that they should not show their pictures to each other.
5. When the groups are ready and the observers settled, the teacher signals the beginning of the task.

Discussion: Time will be saved if the observers have been selected during the previous session. We have established no hard and fast rules for the selection of observers but have proceeded on a rota basis, in which each person takes it in turn and the order of turns is decided by the group. Since everybody has the opportunity to take this role, order is not, in itself, significant. However, where possible, the teacher should ensure that the participants most likely to dominate the interaction do not act as observers in the first two units. These units both focus on the need for equal participation, a factor which is more likely to be highlighted if certain members feel they have been unable to participate fully due to the domination of one or two individuals.

III.4. (ii) During the problem-solving task

1. As soon as the groups begin work, the teacher withdraws. He does not intervene, but observes the groups and takes notes on any problems of communication and interaction.

2. As the time-limit approaches, the teacher can warn the groups or he can leave the responsibility for time-keeping entirely within the hands of the groups.

3. When time runs out, the teacher gives the signal for the groups to stop.

4. When the groups have stopped, the teacher briefly discusses the solution to the problem with the groups.

Discussion: It must be emphasised that the teacher should resist the urge to interfere with a group, even when requested. Clearly, there may be justifiable grounds for interference in some cases: for instance, if the observer is obviously lost - but this is left to the teacher's discretion. At times this is very hard to do, but the teacher should bear in mind that a disastrous performance in the task may make excellent material for feedback and, in our experience, the most profitable discussions at this stage have resulted from a poorly performed task.

In monitoring the students, there are a number of decisions the teacher has to make before the session begins. Initially he has to consider how he is to monitor the groups; whether to observe one group only for the entire task, or all the groups for selected periods.

In addition, he has to consider what he is to monitor; this should include linguistic items, the groups' interaction and performance, and the problems individuals face when communicating in the TL. When dealing with these the teacher should take the following into account: the language which is specific to the task; the language which is related to group roles (i.e., getting the group going and on task); the language which is related to interactional strategies within the group (i.e., gaining the floor, turn-taking). Clearly, the ultimate goal is competence in all three; it is up to the teacher to decide on priorities in terms of monitoring and in relation to the needs and problems of the students.

Task specific language is clearly defined in this unit because the group shares the picture as a focal point for communication. There is a fairly high lexical content in this task, but since the pace of the problem-solving is brisk, participants will have to draw on strategies for paraphrase and circumlocution for items which are either unknown or not retrievable in the time available. Furthermore, it should be noted that the picture contains a number of objects for which there is no one lexical item in English (e.g., marks to show pain) and clearly, in order to describe these, students will have to draw on similar strategies.

However the demands of the task are not purely lexical; in order to convey information about their pictures, the participants are required to describe fairly accurately, with particular emphasis on location and spatial relationships (prepositions, for instance, play a crucial role in this) and to ask questions about other pictures efficiently.

In monitoring the language of group roles, the teacher should bear in mind that as this is only the second unit in the course, the students are still relatively inexperienced group members. In addition, this task requires careful organisation if it is to be completed successfully. Therefore, he could pay attention to the language used by the group to organise itself and to allocate roles to different group members (particularly as this is the focus for further practice in the relevant stage of Mass Production).

As the task requires a high degree of participation from all members, the teacher could also note the strategies employed for taking, keeping and giving the floor (see Allwright (1977) for further discussion). Such strategies are clearly essential in every task and for this reason it is also desirable that the teacher should monitor and subsequently remedy these (where necessary) in an early task, bearing in mind that language practice, by equipping learners with the relevant means of expression, may have some part in indirectly influencing a change in behaviour.

III.4. (iii) The feedback session

1. When the teacher has finished discussing the solution with the groups and when the observers are ready, the teacher signals the start of the feedback session.

2. While the groups are discussing, the teacher withdraws and monitors the groups' performance.

3. After 20 minutes, the teacher signals the end of the feedback session.

Discussion: The teacher can monitor the groups during the feedback in the same way as in the problem-solving task. In Task 2, such monitoring provides an interesting contrast. By sharing the picture as a common frame of reference, the language used in the problem-solving tends to be highly referential; however, as the feedback is less defined, the language used is more abstract and the students are subject to different types of linguistic demands. What is of interest to the teacher, therefore, is the nature of the contrast in performance in these two parts. In our experience, the picture as a focal point in the first part tends to safeguard the flow of communication and thus creates very few serious communication problems (i.e., moments when communication obviously breaks down in the group). However, this safeguard is withdrawn in the feedback and the teacher will probably note that the participants encounter greater difficulty in conveying intended meaning here, although in our experience, this has never been beyond the students' capabilities.

III.4. (iv) The language input session

1. On the basis of observations made during the problem-solving task and the feedback session, the teacher decides on what communication problems need remedying.

2. The teacher focusses on the relevant aspects, elicits suggestions for improvement from the students and follows it up with further practice.

Discussion: It is hard here to talk in general terms about the contents of this session, as so much is dependent on the particular problems of particular learners. However, the guidelines given in III.4. (ii) should give some indication of the type of language focussed on in this unit.

The steps indicated directly above give, in outline, the general approach we adopted in this session. The students' attention was drawn to the feature we wished to highlight in one of three ways - either by replaying the relevant part on the video recording or by

re-creating the context in which the problem occurred, or by recall. The students then suggested possible alternatives and these were supplemented, where necessary, by the teacher. Finally, the teacher set up pair or group work to practise these points further. The emphasis throughout was on function rather than form.

III.4. (v) Mass Production

1. The teacher supervises the re-forming of the groups.
2. He provides the materials necessary for the task.
3. When the groups are ready, the teacher signals the start of Mass Production and withdraws.
4. The teacher monitors the groups while they are working.
5. The teacher signals the time-limit and collects the materials.

Discussion: In the previous unit, the groups had been given the rules for the task, which they had assimilated and checked, as a group, for comprehension. In this unit, their job is to make decisions about the distribution of work within the group, as a reflection of the role allocation emphasised previously. Since there is a close relationship between the preceding parts of the unit and the further practice session, it is highly desirable that the students spend some time on the relevant language in the language input session. Given this, the Mass Production stage should then enable them to put their newly acquired knowledge to the test in a realistic environment. If the teacher prefers to allow a certain period of time to elapse before further practice of new items, then he can carry out this stage of Mass Production at the beginning of the next unit.

PART IV: EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS

IV.1. Piloting

The course was piloted at the University of Lancaster in the Easter vacation of 1978. The course comprised six 2-hour sessions, from 10-12.00 a.m. and 2.-4.00 p.m. The ten students, who worked in two groups of five, were volunteers recruited from the Institute for English Language Education. Their countries of origin were: Venezuela (3), Spain (1), Chile (2), Bruneii (1), Korea (1), Iran (1), and Singapore (1): thus six shared the same L_1 background. The range of ability in English was from near-beginner to near-native. Age was roughly similar (approximately 21), but one student was about 10 years older than the others. Although they did not know each other as a group previously, there were several sub-groups (including a married couple), who had either studied at the Institute together or who were friends. The students were told before volunteering for the course that they would not be receiving intensive, formal language instruction, but were otherwise given no details as to the aims of the course. Video recordings were made of the students at work in each unit.

IV.2. Evaluation

As a means of evaluating the course we used an interactional analysis, a discussion about the course by the students, and our own observations.

IV.2. (i) Interactional analysis

In order to compare the contributions of the participants at the beginning and the end of the course we used an adaptation of Bales' (1950) Interactional Analysis. We added a seventh task in order to test how effective the whole course had been in terms of interaction.

In the first task it was clear that two participants completely dominated the group, which led to a predominance of giving opinion or orientation. Furthermore, there were few attempts at bringing others in, and nobody seemed to be concerned with helping to keep the group on task or on watching the time. There were also signs of tension and uneasiness on the part of one student in particular.

In the seventh task, there was a much broader distribution of utterances by all the group members. The proportion of questions to statements had altered significantly towards the former. Also the students seemed to have more definite roles - one appeared to be the co-ordinator, and the two who dominated in Task 1 did more checking and questioning. There was much less tension in this task than in the first one and no hostility between the participants.

Even though these results are encouraging they still showed that two members did not contribute as much as the others, though they did communicate more in Task 7 than in Task 1. These students were considerably less proficient in English than the others, which may partly explain this.

It is possible, also, that these results may not be due purely to the course, but to other factors, such as the type of problem or the fact that the students had by this time worked together for 12 hours. From our own observations over the period of the course, however, it appeared to us that the participants did take more account of each other as they went on, and they also tried to help those whose English was not so proficient.

IV.2. (ii) The students' evaluation

The points below are taken from a discussion the students had about the course, which we recorded on video-tape while we were absent from the room.

The students did feel they were improving as a group, in solving the tasks. They also realised that everyone's contribution was important and that everyone had a role to play. Furthermore they mentioned that the course was more interesting and captivating than many they had experienced previously, which they regarded as often being boring. Lastly they noted that when they wanted to say something, they had to call on their own knowledge since the teacher was not available for help.

The major criticisms on their part were, firstly, that they sometimes needed more time. They were not sure how much new language they acquired during the course (the acquisition of new language was not a major concern of ours at this stage, however). Lastly, some of the tasks called upon mathematical knowledge, which affected the motivation and communicative ability of the less numerate students in the group.

On the whole, however, they enjoyed the experience, and felt they had learnt more, not only about groups, but also about themselves.

IV.2. (iii) Further observations

In general we were satisfied with the way the course went. The tasks seemed sufficiently engaging and interesting. We were struck by the high degree of involvement and felt that the students were becoming more aware of and sensitive to the problems of working with other people in a group. However, in evaluating the course it is important to take the following into account.

It was hard to gauge how much the students' behaviour was in fact really influenced or actually changed during the course. While it is undeniable that their awareness to group processes and the constraints of working in a group was certainly increased, we could not honestly claim that this was equally matched by a change in behaviour. For example, we could not claim that by the end there was nearly equal participation from all the students in the groups.

The eagerness and co-operation of the students who participated in the pilot course was perhaps not truly representative of the average learning situation. They had all volunteered to take part in what they were told would be a short, free language course. Furthermore, they were motivated by being aware that they were involved in a piece of experimental research. Given this, it is clear that the course needs to be tested in a greater range of learning contexts.

Lack of time was probably our greatest restriction, and to assess the real effect of the course we would want to see it as part of a whole course of study over a longer period. This lack of time also affected the language input sessions, where it was not always possible to cover all the points arising thoroughly.

Furthermore, because our work was of an experimental nature, we did not want any intervention on the part of the teacher; we wished to see how the students coped completely on their own. In a classroom, there might be valid reasons for a teacher to offer odd pieces of advice to orientate the students in a particular direction.

The seating was determined by the position of the video camera and this may have affected communication between participants, but apart from this, the presence of the camera did not appear to inhibit

the students' behaviour.

Finally, we had no part in choosing the level of the students, in terms of their abilities in the TL. There seemed to be a strong correlation between language ability and amount of participation, so there is a need to group students at least roughly according to their ability in the TL, if every student is to have a reasonable proportion of the talking time.

We noted three features of special interest during the course. Firstly, the consistent way in which the students managed to convey a remarkably wide range of meanings, despite, in some cases, limited language proficiency. They did find the more abstract tasks, and the feedback sessions, a little more difficult but, nevertheless, within their capabilities. In addition, the high levels of tolerance, co-operation and mutual help within the groups were striking - this help was both in solving the tasks and each other's language problems. This emphasises how, in the absence of the teacher as a direct source of information, learners do dredge up, draw on and activate their previously acquired knowledge. We were pleased the course appeared to create contexts in which this became possible, and that the students hardly ever resorted to their own first language.

Secondly, the feedback sessions were particularly successful, both from the point of view of the ease with which they were initiated and conducted and the high degree of involvement and participation they promoted. The nature of the discussion here was such that everyone appeared compelled to take part, and since each individual was obliged at one point to take on the role of the chairman, it meant that even the most reticent became the focal participant once. In fact, the more reticent individuals took the observer's part with surprising confidence and lack of inhibition, and they were often encouraged by the others - a fact which amply justifies the inclusion of these sessions as an integral part of the course. Furthermore, we were struck by the real sense of responsibility each observer obviously felt in making his feedback session work. Bearing this in mind we feel, in future, it would be a good idea to give each observer the responsibility of ensuring that the aspects of group performance his feedback dealt with are in fact adhered to in the following sessions.

Finally, the course offered a lot of opportunity for us to observe the students in purposeful communication with each other, demanding a

wide range of abilities in the TL. This provided us with a reasonable profile of the students; such a profile is normally not possible in so short a time. This emphasises the potential of a course of this nature as an introductory or even an on-going component of almost any type of E.F.L. course.

IV.3. Applicability of the Course

The course as such could be used by anyone who is going to implement group work in an educational context. Perhaps its use would be more valid if group work were to be a long-term feature of at least a part of a course, since this would justify the minimum six hours it takes to be completed. However there might be valid reasons for using it even on a short course since it does create a source for communication. Problems in communication, of course, are not restricted to second language users, and therefore we would recommend a course of this nature wherever people work in groups.

With non-native speakers one would have to limit its use to post-beginners since the students do require a reasonable grasp of the language in order to gain something from the course.

Some teachers may be unwilling to introduce group work into the classroom because of cultural constraints. This course would help to overcome some of these constraints by acting as an introduction to group work and also by allowing students to discuss their reservations. There may be a need, however, to adapt the content of the problems to suit the learners' culture. The course was used in August 1978 with a group of students from the University of Qatar on a course at the Institute for English Language Education, University of Lancaster. Although these students had had no previous experience of group work they completed the course effectively, albeit rather slowly.

IV.4. Conclusion

Group work can provide a realistic means of creating purposeful communication in the classroom. This communication can either be an end in itself or the means whereby concrete results are produced (e.g., the deduction of rules for the use of an item of syntax from a piece of written discourse). In order to ensure that groups in the

classroom achieve the ends through effective means, there is a need to sensitise learners to the social processes involved in working with others. The method we have proposed is a practicable way of achieving this in the FL classroom.

Research based on data provided by the students who participated in the pilot course showed that assumptions about the language learner held by many teachers need to be re-examined, particularly in the areas of error (see Bruton, 1978; Samuda, 1978; Buckley, 1978), and the testing of oral communication ability (see Bruton, Buckley and Samuda, 1978).

In the light of the present move towards the teaching of language as communication, further research should be directed towards helping the teacher develop an effective and appropriate methodology.

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